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RUEHRK/AMEMBASSY REYKJAVIK PRIORITY 0020
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 3201
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 8033
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 5652
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO PRIORITY 0412
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C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 001384

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/05/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [MOPS](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA PROTESTS IMPROMPTU VISIT BY ICELANDIC
DIPLOMAT TO TIGER TERRITORY

Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake, Jr. Reasons: 1.4(b, d).

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: An Icelandic diplomat on a tourist visa paid an impromptu visit to the Tamil Tiger de facto capital, Kilinochchi. Icelandic FSO Bjarni Vestmann, who apparently was under consideration for a position with the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM), decided to accompany the SLMM on a relatively routine trip to the Tiger-held Vanni. A diplomatic brouhaha between the Sri Lankan government, the Icelandic Foreign Ministry and the SLMM ensued when a picture of Vestmann shaking hands with LTTE political wing chief Tamilchelvan appeared on Tamil Tiger websites. Both the government of Iceland and the SLMM have reportedly apologized. As a result of the incident, Sri Lankan security forces will likely check diplomatic vehicles entering the Tiger-held Vanni more closely for some time. End summary.

12. (C) In a meeting with Ambassador and Pol Chief, Incoming Norwegian Ambassador Tore Hattrem and his political officer, Erik Nurnberg, confirmed press accounts that Icelandic Foreign Service Officer Bjarni Vestmann had visited Kilinochchi without GSL clearance on October 2 and met LTTE political wing chief Tamilchelvan. Vestmann, who had arrived in Sri Lanka on a tourist visa, was reportedly scouting the possibility of a tour with the Nordic-led Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission. The SLMM then brought him along on a more-or-less routine trip to Kilinochchi, the de facto Tamil Tiger capital.

13. (C) Hattrem said the Tigers became aware of Vestmann's presence and arranged a handshake between him and Tamilchelvan, which they then put up on their website. The Norwegians doubted that Vestmann had engaged in substantive talks with the Tigers. The SLMM called the Norwegian Embassy soon afterwards to report the encounter and express regret over the incident.

14. (SBU) The Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry protested Vestmann's unauthorized visit to the Tiger capital to the

Foreign Ministry of Iceland, demanding the diplomat's "recall." The Sri Lankan MFA reported receiving an "unqualified written apology" on October 3. Embassy received a fax from the GSL Secretariat for Coordinating the Peace Process regarding the "Inappropriate visit to Kilinochchi by Icelandic tourist." The SCOPP note added, "... it was noted that sometimes vehicles belonging to established agencies such as the SLMM were not checked. SLMM agreed that, in view of what had transpired, it was appropriate that the Ministry of Defence exercise greater caution and ensure that checking of all vehicles and the individuals traveling in them be carefully done."

15. (SBU) According to media reports, on October 4 GSL security forces turned back other SLMM monitors seeking to cross into the Vanni at Omanthai when the latter refused to submit to identity checks and searches.

16. (C) COMMENT: The GSL has turned down numerous requests from the Norwegian Embassy and UN agencies for travel to the Vanni in recent months on the grounds that such visits confer legitimacy on the Tigers. The incident is not likely to be helpful to SLMM's relations with the host government. Tighter controls on diplomatic vehicles seeking to cross over to the Tiger-held Vanni will not be conducive to critical humanitarian relief operations or to efforts to advance the peace process. While the turning back of the most recent SLMM convoy is troubling, we hope that the damage done by the episode will be temporary.
BLAKE